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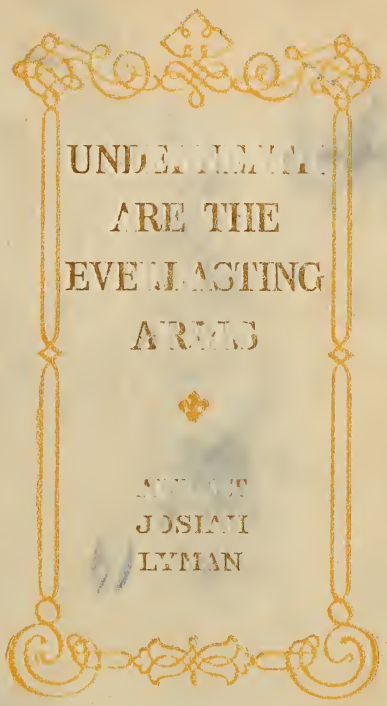

THE LOVE AND CARE OF GOD, BENEATH THE BOTTOM OF ALL THINGS BESIDE

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OUT. STILL UNDERNEATH
PAIN AND FAILURE ARE
THE EVERLASTING ARMS

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BY

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THE PILGRIM PRESS

BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO

BT135
.L9

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NORWOOD · MASS · U · S · A

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UNDERNEATH ARE THE EVERLASTING ARMS

UNDERNEATH *what* are the Everlasting Arms? Underneath our very doubt that there are such arms, that is to say, underneath the fact, whatever it be, that seems to us the deepest fact of all; underneath the feeling, whatever it be, that seems to us the deepest feeling of all.

We are not in this answer amusing ourselves with a mere turn of words; we are meeting squarely the instant challenge of the intellect. "Underneath"; underneath what? And we answer with an equal promptness — underneath what we call the very "bottom facts," underneath the very foundations of conscious thought, underneath our very misgiving about the arms, still deeper stretch the arms themselves — warm, eternal, divine.

For it would almost seem as though a pause were intended to be introduced just after the word "*underneath*," like

the long dash or bracketed blank space in the line when something is left out in writing, and that we struggling mortals are then at liberty to fill in that blank space with any title which to us describes the deepest and most unmanageable fact of life. "Underneath" — then comes the eloquent silence which our utterance is to fill. What shall we put into that open space? Let every man put into it that which to him is deepest. Some of us would perhaps write in the words "*trouble, sickness, bereavement,*" as the profoundest experience we know. Then the sentence would read: "Underneath *trouble* are the Everlasting Arms." Some would introduce the word *temptation*. Then it would read: "Underneath *temptation* are the Everlasting Arms." Many a man would say, The deepest and most inveterate fact I know is my own mad folly. Then write that in.

To some, parental responsibility seems the deepest fact in life. Put that in. To others of different temper, nature's wide force and law may appear to be the fundamental fact in the world. Then write that in. In certain specu-

lative moods a vast, inexorable fate seems the final statement of the universe. Then write in even that. So the sentence will read: "Underneath bereavement, or temptation, or parenthood, or nature, or sin, or fate itself, are the Everlasting Arms."

Fill up that white, vacant space in the line with *anything* which to you gives the sense of being the uncontrollable and final force at the bottom of life, — the very undertone of all; then when you are sure you have it in the sentence, go on to complete it — underneath even *that* are "the Everlasting Arms."

This, then, is our simple but vital theme — the love and care of God as being beneath the bottom of all things beside.

This is not only the parental, it is the *passionately* parental conception of the Deity. The image regnant in this old tingling utterance is, perhaps, the most intense expression of the Fatherhood of God to be found in the entire Old Testament literature. It anticipates that quivering "Abba Father" from the lips of Jesus.

The appeal is to the sense of weakness, of necessary dependence upon a Higher Power, which we ever feel so profoundly, so pathetically, at the very foundation of life, from babyhood to old age, and which Schleiermacher held to be the essence of religion itself.

So weak, so dependent, fatigued, falling, fallen, something catches us from beneath and buoys us up, and this nameless lift from beneath, the inspired Hebrew writer declares to be nothing else or less than the arm of the living God.

But is this anything more than a poet's dream? Is this passionately parental view of the deep heart of the universe warranted? Is it true? How do we know? How can we know? Who can fathom the infinite? Many facts in this stern world do not, on the surface, look as though the supreme force were love.

Let us think about the matter a little.

The Idea of God

First. — As to the warrant for the parental idea of God. Four great generic ideas or modes of regarding the

Infinite Being have attracted the minds of men:

1. The creative — God as Creator.
2. The monarchical — God as Sovereign.
3. The judicial — God as Judge.

Calvinism presents the solid welding together of these three conceptions. In our time a fourth conception has come into relief. It is at once pantheistic and scientific. It is the idea of God as a vast, all-pervasive, universal force,— an infinite but unknowable energy, to recall the favorite phrase of a now rather decadent agnosticism.

Now, the parental thought of God is larger and finer as well as truer than any one of these other conceptions because it includes what is true in them all, and adds its own warm pulse throb besides,

God is Creator; but fatherhood is creative.

God is just; but so is fatherhood judicial.

God is Monarch; but fatherhood is sovereign.

God is Force; but is force any less force because it is fatherly as well?

Right here, however, we must stop a moment, because here is the very firing line of our modern battle of faith. I say *battle* of faith, because faith is always a fight. Faith is not certainty. Certainty is vision. Faith is a struggle toward certainty, or, in a practical way of putting it, faith is the noble, mental push, which, even without the certainty of full vision, dares to swing off upon the weight of evidence.

What, substantially, is the position of the modern educated but non-Christian mind? It is to the effect that God is the ultimate but unknown Power. It may go still further and assert that nothing like what we call fatherhood is in that Power. We can believe, you say, in a tremendous, universal force filling immensity, its foam sparkling with starry worlds; but that force cannot be personal, cannot be parental. Here is the edge of the intellectual quest and battle of our time.

We must be fair to ourselves as to this modern misgiving. It is not a sign of moral delinquency, but rather of intellectual life.

But think a moment. We are not

afraid to join issue at this point. Do our scientific friends remember that nature justifies us in using the word Father as conveying the true and final conception of the Infinite? Is it not precisely as scientific to say, Father-God, as to say Force-God? Fatherhood is the highest form of nature's force. Self-sacrificial human parenthood is, so far as we know, the highest and final product of the evolutional processes, and we reason back from the final product of the universe to the ultimate source of the universe.

The men of science tell us that in reasoning up toward the infinite we must reason from the known to the unknown. Very well. But if so, then surely we may reason from the *highest part of the known to the highest part of the unknown.* The highest part of the known is what we call personality, thought, love, will. If I am to climb to God on your ladder of facts, you shall not take down the upper half of your own ladder. If you reason from force to an infinite force, I reason from love to an infinite love, and this line of the reasoning is precisely as scientific as the other.

What is the upper half of the ladder of nature? *Personal consciousness.* I will stand *there,* then, in order to reason up to God. The force that is coiled in the brain of man is mightier than the force of cyclone or avalanche. But the top round of this top half of nature is *love,* and the tip of this top, the very minaret and finial of nature, is the *self-sacrifice* of a mother's love, as Drummond well argued.[1] I will stand even there, then, and reason up to an infinite love. I reason from the highest thing produced in nature to the highest of the force that produced it. And this is sound reasoning. The logic is straight and strong, and holds like ten Titans. But the logic glows at the finial. It is like a white mountain summit when the sunrise catches it, and it flashes with rose and gold.

The evolutionary philosophy itself must back up into this position, namely, that the Supreme Being possesses that which is the eternal prototype of consciousness in man.

The late Professor John Fiske of Har-

[1] Drummond, *The Ascent of Man. The Evolution of a Mother.*

vard, an evolutionist and Spencerian, writing of his master, Herbert Spencer, declares: "According to Mr. Spencer, the energy which is manifested throughout the knowable universe is the same energy that wells up in us as consciousness." And Professor Fiske therefore maintains that according to the logic of evolution and of biology, the source of the universe must be stated in terms of the highest product of the universe.

I have sometimes illustrated the matter to myself after this fashion: Suppose that from some high rock-cistern in the far hills you lead a line of piping down into the valley, through thicket and mire, until, ascending, it curves up beneath the cellar of your house and passes through every story to where the current of water is released to play as a fountain upon your roof-garden. A learned investigator informs you that he has made an astonishing discovery, namely, that the prismatic play of your roof-fountain is evolved from the shelter of the sleeping rooms beneath, and this again is evolved from the stuffiness of the parlor floor, and this from the sordidness of the kitchen, and this from

the squalor of the cellar, and this from the very slag and slime itself beneath your house. "I have traced that pipe," he explains, "all the way down and this is what it comes from. This is evolution." What will you say to that man? If you say what you think, which is not always the politest way, you will say: "My friend, allow me to remark that you are almost, if not quite, an idiot. Don't you know that the water has to *come down first*, in order to rise *as* it does? Trace up as well as trace down. The play of the fountain *at the summit* offers the true standpoint where you can adequately judge how high in the hills my rock-reservoir is and what is the quality of the water there!" So of the light which the evolutional energy at the summit of its process casts back upon the "hollow of God's hand."

The old Hebrew metaphor is not, then, poetry merely. It is poetry resting upon sound reason. It is inspired truth. "*He that formed the eye, shall he not see?*" He that formed the soul for love, shall he not love? You cannot light your torch by an iceberg, and the flame of parental passion, as we know it

in man, could never have emerged from an iceberg God. The stream does not rise higher than its source, or run with different water. If a mollusk in a million years can develop into Plato, then that wonderful Platonic tendency in the mollusk argues something back of the mollusk as high as Plato. The universe culminates in love only because it began with love.

We conclude then that we have *reason* to believe that the Biblical conception of God is the rational conception and that "underneath *are* the Everlasting Arms."

Second. — How does this truth apply to ourselves in practical experience? How does it not apply! How close it comes home to parents, for example! Parents are a worried lot. They are anxious as to how this boy is to get on at school or in the office; how that daughter is to secure a more ample education when there is hardly enough coming in to make both ends meet. It seems to me that it must be like music to you fathers and mothers if you can realize that the Everlasting Arms are *under your own arms* as you hold up

your child. You are nervous when your dear ones are out of your sight. They are never out of His sight.

But let us inquire a little more closely what some of these "bottom facts" of experience, as we call them, are, which, after all, rest upon God's arms still deeper beneath them. May I briefly mention three? They are *Doubt*, *Pain*, and *Sin*.

Doubt

1*st*. — As has been intimated earlier, *Doubt* is, apparently, in our modern time, one of these ultimate states of mind. And it is most apparently fundamental, and I may add terrible, in its vague, subtle, ethical forms, and this is why doubt is such a deep and appalling thing to *woman*, when it comes to her. I am sure that the relation of the doubt and skepticism of our age to woman has often been overlooked in our mannish discussions. A man doubts with his *brain*, and can endure it. A woman doubts with her *soul* as well as her brain, and cannot so well endure it.

Faith is life with womanhood. Oh,

the desperate ache in the feminine nature when it begins *really* to question whether there is any God, or, if there is, whether he has any *care* for us. But doubt is not the bottom fact. The arms are underneath our very doubt about the arms.

What is doubt? Half of doubt is pain. Doubt is like the sick child's blow back at the very arm that is holding it, and the face that is so tenderly watching it. But you, mother, do not let your poor little child fall, when, in sudden anger, or in a spasm of suffering, the child twists itself back and strikes at your face. God is no harsher than we are. God knows our doubt is half pain, and he will not discard us because of our doubt.

I have said doubt is not the deepest thing. May I venture to give you one moment of metaphysics to show this.

Well, then, you doubt because you *think*, don't you? If you didn't think, you wouldn't doubt. And you think because you have the *power* to think, do you not? If you didn't have the power to think, you wouldn't think. But *power* to think is a *positive* thing, not

negative, isn't it? Certainly. Then, even at the first touch of a rigid analysis, you have passed from negative to positive, that is, from doubt to something there is no doubt about, namely, *power*. And that positive finality which all power implies, even the power to doubt, I call God. God is a Saxon name for a fact. You may call that ultimate, positive fact by many names. Jesus called it Father, and as we have already argued, it is scientifically reasonable to define the ultimate source of all things in the terms of its highest product, and that is parental affection. But that is not the point at this moment. The point at this moment is that the Ultimate Fact, *whatever it is*, is deeper than your doubt about it. One bold thrust of the metaphysical javelin and your final negation is pierced through and through. Doubt is not the "bottom fact" and cannot be.

Do you imagine, my skeptical friend, that your doubt is the outer void which stretches on forever? No. The Positive God, whoever he is, is still on the outside of that outer void. The labyrinth of your doubt is like the labyrinth

of stairways, gangways, blind passages below deck in the great ocean steamer, in which the landsman, bewildered, loses his way; but all the while the mighty steamer is carrying him, *labyrinth and all*, onward to his destination.

Pain

2d. — The truth of the Divine Parental Love lifting at the very foundations of life applies also to *pain*. The Everlasting Arms are underneath pain.

In times of distress, pain seems the deepest thing in the world. Let me point you to a deeper, namely, the *checks and limitations* which God has set to pain. Have you ever thought of the limitations of pain? Have you ever thought of the secondary effects of one person's pain in making other people suffer less? Is yonder invalid's home the most cheerless place in town? Have you ever thought how much *friendship* gathers in the wake of pain — how much pain has to do with the development of the *friendship* of this world? It is pain very largely that develops friendship.

The two qualities of friendship which pain develops are *tenderness* and *tenac-*

ity. Our experience of life changes somewhat. In the early flush of life, under the jet of its warm, young blood, we want something else in friendship, something more impulsive, glowing, passionate; but we get past that.

You remember Sidney Dobell's quaint, strong line: —

> "There's something wrong in the cup, boys,
> There's something ill wi' the bread."

That is what we come to feel. Then follows loss, bereavement, like a shadow on the street. As Charles Kingsley sings: —

> "The merry, merry lark was up and singing,
> And the hare was out and feeding on the lea,
> And the merry, merry bells below were ringing,
> When my child's laugh rang through me.
>
> "Now the hare is snared and dead beside the snow-yard,
> And the lark beside the dreary winter sea;
> Now my baby in his cradle in the churchyard
> Waiteth there until the bells bring me."

Then, last of all, old age approaches, stealing on like a mist over the ocean. Once again may I quote those strangely chiming lines of dear old Tom Hood: —

> "Spring it is cheery,
> Winter is dreary,
> Green leaves hang, but the brown must fly;

When he's forsaken,
Withered and shaken,
What can an old man do but die?"

And in all these changes, what we come at last deep down to want in a friendship are these two things, *tenderness* and *tenacity*. Well, we have them in God's friendship. Tenderness — that is the "arms." Tenacity — that is the "everlasting." Beneath our pain something still pulses and presses. It is the *Arm*, lasting — everlasting.

But again you say, "Prove it." Prove it? I prove it by the deeper analysis of pain itself, which shows the moment you cut into it a principle of self-limitation, a principle of transmutation of pain into power, and so into a higher peace, which nothing but Intelligent Love could have either conceived or introduced. I prove it by the words of the greatest sufferers who, from the summits of anguish, have looked out upon visions of victory. *I prove it by the intuition of the agony of Calvary.*

Pain cannot be the deepest fact of life. If so, the air was made for the hurricane, and clouds for the thun-

derbolt, and that cannot be. Pain is provisional. It is educative. It is disciplinary. It is not final.

A man came to me the other day and said: "My dear fellow, I have failed in business. The bottom has dropped out." The first part of his sentence was true enough, but not the last part. *The bottom never drops out.* Still underneath pain and failure are the "Everlasting Arms."

A man fails in health. He thinks that means pauperism to his children. Despairing, he is yet brave, and staggering up the street he salutes an acquaintance with his usual nod, and with purple lips mutters something about being "down on his luck." Does God in heaven know what his poor children are stumbling against in the thickets? Yes, he does know; and even that very thicket itself may be on the shortest road home.

And so also the Everlasting Arms are not only underneath our individual doubt and pain, but they are underneath those more general conditions of environment and of drift in affairs which we often say are

mainly responsible for our pain and failure.

It has been the fashion (until just of late—the philosophic apprehension now seems swinging into a less fatalistic mood) to speak of the "environment" as a kind of ultimate, inexorable fact. We look out upon the wide field and we see much that is calamitous and bewildering. Things seem to be either drifting or driving on, under intricate and irreversible machinery of law, we know not whither, like clouds before the wind, or boats in a flood; and you say the doctrine of the love of God does not and cannot apply to this vast welter of unmanageable public currents.

Ah, friend, this conclusion is due to a limitation of vision. The parental thought of God applies here also, if it applies anywhere. Let us be logicians. Everywhere or nowhere is the logic of the love of God.

You ask, "Why, then, are not things better?" I turn the same question back and ask, with equal force, "Why are they not worse?" That they are as well as they are and struggling upward, when they so easily might be worse, indicates

the fundamental uplift of a parental God.

Oh, take hold of this and take courage, you who lament what you call irretrievable calamity and the curse of whose curse is that it seems to you "irretrievable," — something necessary, inescapable, final, something in blood, in brain, in heredity, in environment — what not, that constantly hems you in, smites you down, cuts back upon you. Not so, nothing is so deep that those arms of God are not deeper. We cut ourselves and cry, but God lifts and carries *child*, *cut*, and *cry* all together, near his face and bosom.

Perhaps even the very Arm itself is hidden from your eyes beneath that which it is upholding. Your little child does not always *see* your arm when you are holding him.

Sin

3d. — Then, last of all, comes sweeping into view, like some great, gleaming orb, that final and deepest application of the truth before us: that the helping, rescuing arms of God are underneath even that dark mystery that we call human *sin*.

I must say only a word of this in closing. God forgive us ministers that we put this truth so coldly. We talk of the *doctrine* of the "Atonement." Oh, that we realized the *fact* of the atonement, and the parental passion glowing at the heart of the universe that the word atonement means!

Here, too, we must follow Christ's lead in illustrating the divine sentiment by the human. You do not repudiate your child or drive him from your door because he has done *wrong*, do you? You suffer for his sake, if you can only save him, do you not?

A dear friend of mine once carried his little boy to one of our Brooklyn hospitals to undergo a severe and dangerous surgical operation. The morning of the day of the operation my friend was with me a few moments in my study. He walked up and down the room, clenching his hands in the restlessness of his anxiety, and said: "O my God, *if I could only be hurt instead of my child!*" How far does that feeling go? Does it stop with surgery? You know it goes far enough to take in the *sin* as well as sickness of a child.

Does it stop at the hospital door? I tell you it goes *through and through the Living God.* Let us grasp that principle with both hands.

Here was the feeling in my friend. Where did he get it? Where did it come from? I am sure I do not need to remind you that God himself is revealed in that father's feeling. God is not up there in a white, cold heaven watching it, but he is *in it.*

Christianity is the religion which tells us this, by its doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement. Mark that word *incarnation.* We hold to no weak, diluted orthodoxy. On the contrary, we hold that the strong, old faith of the Church Universal incorporates this very idea of a loving rescue in its sublimest form. That word *incarnation* — it is a rich, red word. Remember that we use the same root-word when we say *incarnadine.* The Gospel revelation *incarnadines* our pallid thought of God and makes it flush and glow. Christ's Incarnation is with literal precision the blood-red embodiment of God's feeling, his love and suffering. We disavow and repel as puerile and

provincial that false orthodoxy which would imply that Christ had one feeling and God another. Hear St. Paul's majestic peal — "God *in Christ*, reconciling the world unto himself." Christ is not a lamb slain out in the bleak pastures in front of some rock-image of a god, in order to make that rock-image weep. *Atonement is not outside of God but in him.*

The Method of Moral Salvation

Illustrations fail. Take one — Christ's own. The domestic analogy comes nearest to the heart of the matter.

You are a father. Your son is wayward and commits some act, not an ordinary misdemeanor, but some grievous public wrong which overwhelms you and the family with sadness and shame. At length concealment is impossible — he comes to you and confesses his wrong. What shall you say to him? What shall you do to him? You cannot command yourself to speak. A hot indignation flames in your soul. You say, "Go away now, my boy, I must be alone," and then you are alone. You lock the door and walk up and

down the room in an agony of mental conflict. On the one hand is love — your love for your own flesh and blood; on the other hand, the burning, blistering sense of the disgrace your child has brought on his father's and his mother's name.

How many a parent has passed through this desperate experience! But at length it is over, and you come forth from your room pale but steady, only with some after-quiver of the agony lingering about the cadence of your voice; and then you call your son, and you tell him that you — *forgive him.* But now, mark! This is a forgiveness that *saves* your son. It is as far as possible from the easy indulgence which would make light of the offense and toss the whole affair aside with careless good nature. Such a forgiveness as that would not touch your boy very deeply; but this forgiveness, born out of suffering, has in it a strangely penetrating and vicarious and even remedial and redemptive quality, and it pierces to the heart of your boy.

But now, mark again! It pierces to *that in your boy which you have given to*

him in the mystery of your parenthood. It reaches to the *you* in your son. He "comes to himself" as we say; that is, he comes to the you that is in him. He is "all broken up" as we say — *i.e.*, the family nature in him wells up and overcomes the defective, merely individual nature. He is himself, but he is you. He is changed. He is saved. Now Christ tells us that through such a lens of human life we can look up toward the Infinite Father. Sacrificial parenthood incarnates itself in the life of one child in order to touch into renewed life the latent or disowned image of itself in another child. Is this Scriptural? Certainly it is. Is it orthodox? Certainly it is. It is the orthodoxy of the universal living soul of Christendom, but stated in the terms of life, and leaving its background of mystery without attempt to solve it. In Christ's parable of The Prodigal, the forgiveness was the issue of something which went on in the Father's own heart. May we not say that Christ *is the Father's own heart?* He is not outside that heart.

Yonder man, in desperate self-reproach, exclaims: "The deepest gulf I

know is my own sin, my own mad passion, my own accursed folly." Why, no, friend, there is something deeper than that — the forgiving mercy of your God.

Have you ever yet come home so fallen that your mother would not take you in, and does your God love less? Where did motherhood light the lamp of its immortal love? Your God! Who is he? The God you are thinking of is a wooden God. Your God is the Matterhorn at midnight, not the real God. The real God broods and yearns and aches for us mortals, for we are of his own self, as a child is of the mother's self. Christ teaches us that. If you accept Christ's teaching you must believe that. Love is the same sort of love here and in heaven, in motherhood, and in God. We have Christ's authority for that in his parable of The Prodigal. Two tiny drops of water unite by virtue of the same force of gravity which holds the planets in on their flying march, though crowding out against the rim of their bright track, as if they rolled against walls of invisible crystal. So love is the same thing here and in the heavens.

You may have heard the story of President Davies. One day he met a man whom he had formerly known well, a man of cultivated intellect, who had become a victim of alcohol, and had lost all power of self-restraint.

"Sir, you can be saved," said the president. "Sign the pledge."

"I have signed and failed," was the answer. "I have no strength of will to keep the pledge."

Said President Davies, "*I will be your strength to keep the pledge.* When your appetite burns, come to my house, sit with me in my study. I will be a shield to you. All that I can do for you with my books, my sympathy, my experience, my society, I will do. You shall first master your appetite, then forget it."

The astonished man said, "Sir, will *you* do all that?" "Surely, I will." "Then, I will come." And he did and was a rescued man. This is not fantastic; it is not chimerical; it is the reproduction, in human type, of what Christ reveals as being the truth at the heart of all this wonderful world.

Deeper than the "bottom facts," as

you call them, is a love out of sight. We cannot always understand it. Neither can your baby understand you. Be patient with God, dear brother, even as you would have your child patient with you. Wait and see what things really mean.

So shall the ultimate vision of faith grow definite and grow grand, and the perturbed spirit will quiet itself in peace. A divine buoyancy will lift beneath the very foundations of life. And when at last the world falls into shadow, and death draws near, we shall only settle ourselves a little closer, nestling down within those Arms Everlasting, as they carry us still on into and *across* the darkness.

OCT 23 2010

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Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: July 2005

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